

# Race and Ethnicity: A Comparison of Hiring Practices in For-profit and Non-profit International Schools in China

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#### **ABSTRACT**

Over the years, there have been accusations of widespread discrimination in the hiring practices of various educational establishments in China, and it seems that these accusations are continuing to intensify. This research study aimed to explore race and ethnicity in the hiring process in K-12 international schools in China and provide data that can be used to discuss and further study race and ethnicity in international schools. Using the context of for-profit and non-profit international schools, the researcher used an observational quantitative research design to explore international school staff perceptions of racial demographics, hiring practices, and the projection of equal opportunity in the hiring process of foreign staff in China. This study revealed few statistically significant differences between for-profit and non-profit international schools in China in the areas mentioned above. Additionally, the data revealed similar percentages of blacks and whites between the survey participants and the demographic data for those groups in the United States. Further, the data showed that foreign administrators are the primary decision-making agents in the hiring process at most international schools. Furthermore, only one-fourth of the participants were aware that their school maintained an equal opportunity clause in the hiring document or on the school's website. The findings from this study may be used to counter accusations of widespread discrimination in the hiring practices of international schools in China and elsewhere. Further, findings from this study should motivate administrators of international schools to examine staff perceptions of the hiring process in their schools.

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#### Keywords:1

Employment discrimination, hiring practices, international schools

## INTRODUCTION

Over the years, much discussion has taken place concerning the hiring practices and staffing in international schools (Bruno, 2016; ISR, 2009). Additionally, there have been assertions that the international school market is rife with racism towards non-white staff (Anonymous Ex-Recruiter; 2020; Pearson, 2022). Further, there have been postings on social media (Makosz, 2020) and websites catering to international school teachers (Anonymous Ex-Recruiter, 2020b, Mrs. B, 2020) concerning discriminatory staffing practices towards what many refer to as people of color in international schools, including those in China. Unfortunately, the problem with many publications and postings is that very little, if any, data with statistical analysis is put forth to provide evidence. Further complicating the issue and limiting professional dialogue is that censorship has become common on numerous social media platforms and other websites offering discussion forums, nullifying opposing views (Anonymous, 2020; Griffin, 2020; Romankewicz, 2020; Staff, n.d.). Lastly, some people place blame on the parents, recruiters, and the schools that cater to the market demands of the parents for perpetuating discriminatory hiring practices (Anonymous Ex-Recruiter; 2020; Char, 2021; Pearson, 2022; Scott, 2021).

# For-profit and Non-profit Schools

International schools can be classified as for-profit or non-profit (Scarborough, 2015). While traditionally non-profit, the international school marketplace has been shifting towards a for-profit model (Waterson, 2015). For-profit schools can be part of a corporate portfolio, owned by a business or group of partners, or owned by an individual. Overall, the exact number or percentage of for-profit schools is unknown. In 2014, the Economist reported that approximately two-thirds of international schools were for-profit oriented (The Economist Staff, 2014). Studying the provision of ELL resources between for-profit and non-profit schools in East Asia, Lehman (2021) found that of 489 participants, 285 reported teaching in a for-profit school, which revealed that 58% of the study participants were in for-profit schools. The reported data from these two sources indicate that more than half of the international school market is comprised of for-profit schools.

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#### Ethnicity and Race in the United States and China

The United States continuously becomes more and more diverse, and people worldwide make the United States a destination of choice for immigration. According to the United States Census Bureau (2019), 60.3% of the population was non-Hispanic white, and 13.4% was black or African American. The Census Bureau data further shows that Hispanics and Latinos comprise 18.5% and Asians 5.9%, leaving the remaining 4.3% for biracial and indigenous peoples.

There is very little data available detailing the population of blacks living in China. However, there is data available for portions of China, including Guangzhou, which has a higher concentration of blacks or people of African descent than other cities in China. In 2010, Sun Yat-sen University reported that 11,000 Africans were living in Guangzhou (Zhou, 2018). According to the Census Office of the State Council of the People's Republic of China (2012), the population of Guangzhou in 2011 was 12,701,948. Using these figures, the percentage of blacks or people of African descent living in Guangzhou in 2011 was approximately 0.087%. Pinghui (2014) reported that the Guangzhou government revealed that 16,000 African people lived in the city. In 2014, the population of Guangzhou was 13,080,500 (Statistics Bureau of Guangzhou, 2016), making the population of African people 0.122% of the population.

## Accusations of Racism in China and Whitewashing Racism Elsewhere

Regardless of being for-profit or non-profit, schools must recruit students and strive to have a surplus of money after meeting expenses to remain operational. Many people assume that only for-profit schools are chasing after the whims of the market. Further, many assume that these whims come from the local market, which is commonly reported to be a racist culture by the modern-day media (Marsh, 2021; Wang, 2021). However, many modern-day media whitewash racist behavior by political leaders in native-English speaking countries, such as Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau in blackface (Penny et al., 2019) and Virginia Governor Ralph Northam in blackface (Dwyer, 2019). There is also the whitewashing of American President Joe Biden, eulogizing former Ku Klux Klan (KKK) member and Senator Robert Bird (Joffe-Block and Chacon, 2020). To further the point, most Americans have no idea that the Biden family owned slaves in the 19 th century (Panetta, 2021). Similarly, the family of Vice President Kamala Harris owned slaves (O'Rourke, 2020).

#### **Equal Opportunity Clause**

To combat discrimination, some governments establish legislation or policy about hiring practices discouraging discriminatory hiring practices. In the United States, Title 41, Chapter 60-1.4 of the Code of Federal Regulation contains the Equal Opportunity Clause. This clause states that "the contractor will not discriminate against any employee or applicant for employment because of race, color, religion, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, or national origin" (Cornell Law School, n.d., 1). In the United Kingdom, there is a provision for the equal opportunity under the Equality Act of 2010 (The Equal Opportunities Commission, n.d.). Article three of the Employment Promotion Law passed during the National People's Congress in 2007 in China states that workers are entitled to equal employment and should not experience discrimination based on race and ethnicity (China Daily, 2014). These legal statutes intend for job applicants to have equal opportunities in the application process for open employment positions. While not bound to these legal statutes, international schools can easily include language on their website that reveals a non-discriminatory stance in their hiring practices (Hilty, 2020) or display a statement or plan concerning anti-racism (International School of Anti-Racism, 2020). Lastly, international schools can place an equal opportunity clause within the hiring documents.

## Aim of Research and Research Question

This research study aimed to explore international school staff perceptions of race and ethnicity in the hiring process in K-12 international schools in China and provide data that can be used in the discussion and study of race and ethnicity in international schools. Using the context of for-profit and non-profit schools, the researcher developed a single research question.

What are the differences in the hiring practices concerning race and ethnicity between for-profit and non-profit international schools in China?

While data will be presented in a comparative context, the totals for participants from both entities will be combined to provide an overall picture of race and ethnicity in the hiring process in K-12 international schools in China.

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#### **METHOD**

## **Design and Instruments**

The researcher used an observational quantitative research design consisting of two cross-sectional surveys. A cross-sectional survey does not manipulate a variable; instead, the survey collects data at a single point in time (Creswell, 2012). Each group of participants received a separate survey. For this study, there were six survey questions. Questions one, three, and six were only on the survey sent to foreign teachers, and questions two, four, and five were asked on both surveys (see Appendix). The survey sent to Chinese staff was translated into Chinese by a native Chinese speaker. To establish content validity, two international school educators, who did not participate in the study, served as experts in the field (Creswell, 2012; Salkind, 2013) and reviewed the research questions and survey questions. The first practitioner had been a classroom teacher at various international schools in China, and the second practitioner had taught in an international school in South America, both Americans. Measured according to the instructions of Polit and Beck (2006), the survey questions had an acceptable universal agreement (S-CVI = 1.00).

# **Participants**

The researcher used the Internet to search school websites and other websites for names, positions, and contact information for potential participants working in international schools in China. The researcher sent potential participants a survey request to their school email address, and all participants were working in an international school when they completed the survey. The researcher sent a survey request to 519 foreign teachers and 575 Chinese staff. Of the 519 foreign teachers who were sent a survey request, 100 completed the survey. Of 575 Chinese staff who were sent a survey request, 54 completed the survey. Overall, the study had 154 participants.

## **Data Collection Process**

In the introductory email, potential participants were informed of the intentions of the study. Additionally, a website link was provided, allowing potential participants to view the research questions and additional information about the study, including biographical information about the researcher. The website also provided a contact box so potential participants could ask questions before and after choosing to complete the survey. The potential participants were not promised any reward and were not coerced into completing the survey. Participation was voluntary, and when taking the survey, none of the questions were mandatory. The researcher used Survey Monkey to host the surveys; all data were stored via a password-protected laptop and password-protected external hard drive.

## **Data Analyses**

The researcher used SPSS software (v. 27) to perform Pearson chi-square tests with an alpha level of .05. The Pearson chi-square test is a nonparametric test used to analyze nominal data (Creswell, 2012; McHugh, 2013). For each omnibus chi-square test, the adjusted residuals were calculated by SPSS (Sharpe, 2015). If relevant, adjusted residuals that exceeded +/-2.0 are reported (Sharpe, 2015).

#### **FINDINGS**

The foreign participants were asked to reveal their ethnicity and the business model of their school. The results of a Pearson chi-square test revealed that there was not a statistically significant difference in the racial/ethnic makeup of the foreign staff between for-profit schools (Group 1: n = 63) and non-profit schools (Group 2: n = 37),  $\chi^2$  (5, N = 100) = 4.782, p = 0.443. Further, the Likelihood ratio was p = .378. Post hoc analysis of adjusted residuals revealed no points of significance. Table 1 provides counts and percentages of race and ethnicity of staff.

Table 1. Race and ethnicity of foreign staff

Race	Asian	Black of	Indian	Latin of	White of	Other	Total
Business		African	(Asia)	Hispanic	European		
Model		Descent		Descent	Descent		
For-Profit	8	9	3	4	35	4	63
	12.7%	14.3%	4.8%	6.3%	55.6%	6.3%	
Non-Profit	1	4	3	1	24	4	37
	2.7%	10.8%	8.1%	2.7%	64.9%	10.8%	
Total	9	13	6	5	59	8	100
Total %	9.0%	13.0%	6.0%	5.0%	59.0%	8.0	100%

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The foreign participants were asked to reveal who has the authority to hire foreign staff in their school, Chinese or foreign administrator. The results of a Pearson chi-square test revealed that there was not a statistically significant difference in the racial/ethnic makeup of the foreign staff between for-profit schools (Group 1: n = 63) and non-profit schools (Group 2: n = 36),  $\chi^2$  (2, N = 99) = .216, p = 0.642. Further, Fischer's Exact Test was p = .639. Table 2 provides counts and percentages of who makes the hiring decision according to the business model.

Table 2. Who makes the hiring decisions?

Nationality	Chinese	Foreign	Total	
<b>Business Model</b>	Administrator	Administrator		
For-profit	11	52	63	
	17.5%	82.5%		
Non-profit	5	31	36	
_	13.9%	86.1%		
Total	16	83	99	
	16.2%	83.8%	100%	

The Chinese and foreign participants were asked to reveal if they believed race and ethnicity played a role in hiring foreign staff in their school. The results of a Pearson chi-square omnibus test revealed that there was not a statistically significant difference in the racial/ethnic makeup of the foreign staff between for-profit schools (Group 1: n = 63) and non-profit schools (Group 2: n = 37),  $\chi^2$  (5, N = 100) = 4.782, p = 0.443. Further, the Likelihood ratio was p = .378. However, post hoc analysis of adjusted residuals revealed a statistical significance. Table 3 provides counts, percentages, and adjusted residuals.

Table 3. Race plays a role in the hiring of foreign staff

Race	Very Unlikely	Unlikely	Likely	Very Likely	Total
Business					
Model					
For-Profit	20	25	48	12	105
	19.0%	23.8%	45.7%	11.4%	
Adjusted	.4	-2.4	1.8	.2	
Residual					
Non-Profit	8	21	15	5	49
	16.3%	42.9%	30.6%	10.2%	
Adjusted	4	2.4	-1.8	2	
Residual					
Total	28	46	63	17	154
Total %	18.2%	29.9%	40.9%	11.0%	100%

The Chinese and foreign participants were asked to reveal what they believed to be the percentage of staff that is black of African descent. The results of a Pearson chi-square omnibus test revealed that there was not a statistically significant difference in the racial/ethnic makeup of the foreign staff between for-profit schools (Group 1: n = 104) and non-profit schools (Group 2: n = 49),  $\chi^2$  (5, N = 153) = 1.382, p = 0.926. Further, the Likelihood ratio was p = .929. Table 4 provides counts and percentages of the percentage of staff that is black of African descent.

Table 4. Percentage of staff that is black or of African descent

Race	0	1-5	6-10	11-15	16-20	21	Total
Business	percent	percent	percent	percent	percent	percent or more	
Model							
For-Profit	10	64	15	8	3	4	104
	9.6%	61.5%	14.4%	7.7%	2.9%	3.8%	
Non-	4	27	10	5	1	2	9
Profit	8.2%	55.1%	20.4%	10.2%	2.0%	4.1%	
Total	14	91	25	13	4	6	53
Total %	9.2%	59.5%	16.3%	8.5%	2.6%	3.9%	100%



The foreign participants were asked to reveal if their school had an Equal Opportunity Clause in the hiring document or on the school website. The results of a Pearson chi-square omnibus test revealed that there was not a statistically significant difference in the racial/ethnic makeup of the foreign staff between for-profit schools (Group 1: n = 63) and non-profit schools (Group 2: n = 37),  $\chi^2$  (5, N = 100) = .454, p = 0.797. Further, the Likelihood ratio was p = .796. Table 5 provides counts and percentages.

Table 5. Is there an Equal Opportunity Clause in the hiring document or on the school website?

<b>Business Model</b>	Yes	No	I do not know	Total
For-Profit	14	11	38	63
	22.2%	17.5%	60.3%	
Non-Profit	10	5	22	37
	27.0%	13.5%	59.5%	
Total	24	16	60	100
Total %	24%	16%	60%	100%

#### **DISCUSSION**

# Race and Ethnicity Participants

While there have been assertions of racial imbalances in the staffing of international schools (Bruno, 2016; ISR, 2009; Pearson, 2022), there were no statistically significant differences in race and ethnicity of the participants between for-profit and non-profit schools in the present study. However, the combined percentages of the for-profit and non-profit staff reveal useful data to measure race and ethnicity percentages in international schools in China. These percentages can be used to compare with race and ethnicity data reported by the United States Census Bureau. For example, 59% of the participants revealed their race and ethnicity as white of European descent, consistent with the 60% of the United States population being white of non-Hispanic descent (U.S. Census Bureau, 2019). Further, 13% of the participants identified themselves as black of African descent, and approximately 13% of the U.S. population is black of African descent (United States Census Bureau, 2019). Table 6 compares percentages between the study and United States Census Bureau data.

Table 6. Race and ethnicity of foreign staff

Race	Asian	Black of	Indian	Latin of	White of	Other	Total
		African	(Asia)	Hispanic	European		
		Descent		Descent	Descent		
Study	9.0%	13.0%	6.0%	5.0%	59.0%	8.0%	100%
<b>Participants</b>							
U.S.	5.9%	13.4%	NA*	18.5%	60.3%	NA*	
Population							

<sup>\*</sup>Category not specified by U.S. Census Bureau (2019)

Overall, the percentages for black of African descent and white of European descent, as revealed by the participants, are consistent with the percentages reported by the United States Census Bureau.

# Hiring Decisions and Race as a Role in the Hiring of Foreign Staff

Lehman (2021) reported that over half of the participants worked in for-profit schools, and data from the current study shows that 64% worked in for-profit schools. Additionally, the data from the current study shows that 83.8% of the participants reported that the foreign administrator makes the hiring decisions, of which 62.1% were in for-profit schools, and 36.9% were in non-profit schools. Further, a foreign administrator made the hiring decisions in a high percentage of all schools. Post hoc analysis of adjusted residuals revealed a statistical significance concerning the role of race in the hiring decision of foreign staff between for-profit and non-profit schools. The forced four-point Likert scale data shows that non-profit schools were more unlikely to hire based on race versus for-profit schools. With an adjusted residual of 1.8 for for-profit and -1.8 for non-profit, concerning the likeliness that race might play a role, further investigation is warranted into whether this indicates a statistically significant difference between for-profit and non-profit schools.

## Percentage of Staff that is Black or of African Descent

Of the 153 responses providing information on the percentage of the black or African staff employed in their school, 91 (59.5%) placed the percentage at 1-5%. Of those 91 participants, 64 (70.3%) were working in for-profit schools. Of the 153 responses, the next highest reported percentage of black or African descent staff was 6-10%, with 25 (16.3%) reporting. Overall, the reported percentages of staff that are black or of African descent fell within the range of 1-10%. Of the 153 responses, only 14 (9.2%) reported no black or of African descent representation on staff. When compared to the percentage of black or people of African descent living in China, the percentage of the teachers that are black or of African descent working in international schools in China is well above those reported to be living in Guangzhou, China, which is known for having a higher concentration of blacks or people of African descent than other cities in China (Pinghui, 2014; Statistics Bureau of Guangzhou, 2016; Zhou, 2018). While the reported percentage of teachers working in international schools in China who are black or of African descent is below the percentage reported to be living in the United States (Census Bureau, 2019), the percentage of foreign teacher participants in the study identifying as black or of African descent was almost equal to the percentage reported to be living in the United States (Census Bureau, 2019).

## **Equal Opportunity Clause**

Hilty (2020) encouraged schools to be transparent to the public concerning the school's non-discriminatory hiring practices, and International School of Anti-Racism (2020) called on international schools to publicly assert their anti-racist stances and practices. While there have been many assertions of discriminatory hiring practices in the international school market (Anonymous Ex-Recruiter; 2020; Makosz, 2020; Mrs. B, 2020; Pearson, 2022), the data revealed that many foreign teacher participants did not know if there was such a clause in the hiring documents or on the school website. Of the 99 foreign teacher participants providing an answer, 83 (83.8%) revealed that a foreign administrator made the hiring decision concerning foreign staff. However, of the 100 foreign teacher participants in the study, only 24 (24%) revealed knowledge of an equal opportunity clause in the hiring document or on the school website. Lastly, a Pearson chi-square analysis revealed no statistically significant difference between for-profit and non-profit schools in foreign teacher knowledge of an equal opportunity clause within their school.

# **CONCLUSION**

This study aimed to explore race and ethnicity in the hiring process in K-12 international schools in China. Overall, the data in this study revealed very little by way of statistically significant differences concerning race and ethnicity between for-profit and non-profit international schools in China. The percentages of the foreign teacher participants that were black of African descent and white of European descent mirrored the race and ethnicity percentages for those groups in the United States as reported by the United States Census Bureau. Additionally, the data showed that most participants in both for-profit and non-profit international schools revealed that foreign administrators made most hiring decisions concerning foreign staff. An omnibus chi-square analysis of participant responses as to whether race plays a role in the hiring process revealed no statistically significant differences. However, post hoc analysis of the adjusted residuals revealed a difference in pairwise comparisons that were statistically significant between for-profit and non-profit schools concerning the likeliness that race might play a role in the hiring process.

In general, the reported percentages of black or African descent teachers were primarily within the range of 1-10%. While this number is below the population percentage for blacks in the United States, it is well above the percentage of black or African people living in China. Interestingly, of the 100 foreign participants in the study, 13% were black of African descent, yet most participants reported a lower percentage of teachers who were black of African descent teaching in their school. While China, the United Kingdom, and the United States have legal statutes concerning equal opportunity in employment, only about one-fourth of the foreign participants in the study revealed that they knew their school had an equal opportunity clause in the school hiring documents or on the school website. Further, most foreign teachers in the study do not know if their school displays an equal opportunity clause.

# Limitations and Suggestions

A primary limitation of this study was the small number of participants. When analyzing the data, it was assumed that the participants understood the questions and answered the questions truthfully. While the data in this study did not reveal widespread racism and discrimination in the hiring practices of international schools in China, the researcher suggests that administrators strive to ensure equal opportunity in employment is practiced and projected to the public and job applicants. Because of the accusations of

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discrimination in the hiring practices of international schools in China, additional research is suggested to pinpoint areas in which wrongful hiring practices are occurring.

Over the years, there have been accusations of widespread discrimination in the hiring practices of various educational establishments in China, and it seems that these accusations are continuing to intensify. While the data revealed few statistically significant differences between for-profit and non-profit international schools in China, findings from this study can be used to counter accusations of widespread discrimination in the hiring practices of international schools in China and possibly elsewhere. The researcher suggests websites catering to international educators and social media platforms provide opportunities for authentic discussions concerning the topic of discrimination in the hiring practices of educational establishments in China and elsewhere instead of engaging in censorship of posts containing opposing views or citations offering statistical data that counter a narrative. Due to the findings of this study, the researcher further suggests that international schools examine staff perceptions of the hiring process in their schools and work to provide transparency throughout the hiring process.

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